

Relationship between Mental Health and Coping Styles with Students' Educational Performance at Kashan University, Iran

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Abstract -- *The present research was conducted to study the relationship between mental health and copying styles with students' educational performance at Kashan University in the academic year 2012-2013. It is a descriptive survey research. The statistical population included all the students studying at Kashan University. The sample involved 300 students that were selected at random. In this sampling method, 60 individuals were randomly selected from each faculty. To select the model group, random sampling was applied. The research used Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire (with 28 items) as well as Endler and Parker's Stress Coping Styles Questionnaire (with 48 items). The data were analyzed by indexes such as descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis. To measure the correlation between mental health and coping styles with educational achievement, Pearson correlation was used. There was a significant relationship between mental health and coping styles with educational performance. Moreover, step-by-step regression was used for determining the effect of mental health and coping styles on educational performance. The results showed that there was a negative significant relationship between depression syndrome and educational achievement. However, both anxiety syndrome and problem-oriented coping style had a positive significant relationship with educational achievement.*

Keywords: mental health; coping style; educational performance; university student

I. Introduction

Today, theorists believe that one of the most significant reasons for development in the developed countries is their attempting to train creative efficient labor forces. University students are the selected manpower constructing a country's future and their academic success is one of the main objectives in educational programs. Due to educational success, they can use their maximum internal and external powers to achieve higher education objectives and provide the required conditions for a successful social life. In contrast, educational failure paves the way for many personal and social problems together with deviation from reaching the objectives of the educational system. Moreover, school dropouts as one of the most important

damages to the educational system may waste resources. Also, this problem is noticeably observed at universities. Regarding educational dropout, there are different interpretations all claiming that decrease in students' willingness to successfully complete their formal education is one of its common reasons. Every educational system is always evaluated by the experts toward obtaining the best conditions and results for removing the deficiencies and barriers throughout educational processes and optimally using the inputs. Educational achievement can be one of the most important objective standards for the assessment of efficiency in educational systems (Shoarinejad, 1997). Given what mentioned above, experts in various domains of educational psychology have long attempted to understand the determining factors that influence educational achievement (Hadadi-Kouhsar, 2007). Among the factors, variables such as mental health and coping styles can be mentioned. Students who are the products of the educational system can succeed in education when they have the required mental health. Since coping styles deeply influence educational achievement, they cannot be ignored; therefore, it may be stated that application of effective coping styles determines an individual's successful educational performance. Achievement in educational environments, particularly at universities, has the highest significance (Zowghi-Paidar, *et al.*, 2005).

According to psychological theories, coping styles have an important role in reducing stress and, as a result, in people's general health. Coping styles, in general, are applied to psychological and behavioral attempts to prevent, manage, and reduce stress. It is evident that unsuccessful use of stress coping style may lead to affective fatigue, exhaustion, and unhealthiness, a consequence of which is educational dropout. The better the students' public health, the more their educational achievement. Health, or general health, is one of the components that may predict students' educational achievement. It appears that, by reinforcing the factors that influence students' education, it is more possible for them to gain more achievements.

People's psychological health in a society, particularly its effective and constructive strata, is required for its dynamism, maturity, and promotion (Pakizeh, 1987). According to World Health Organization (WHO), "psychological health is involved

in the general concept of health, and health means full ability to play social, psychological, and physical roles; health is not merely the absence of disease and being undeveloped” (Ganji, 2003). Rogers’ model of a healthy personality and mental health shows a highly efficient human being with full function, who applies all his abilities and talents, and has some characteristics such as gaining experience, feeling free, and developing creativity (Verdi, 2001). The major unique role of students, as future managers and constructors in any society, necessitates providing their mental health as well as identification and removal of the negative factors influencing it. Correlation between mental health and educational performance is quite justifiably acceptable, because not only educational dropout may damage an individual’s health but mental problems may also cause educational dropout. During their studies, students usually experience various educational, social, and financial stresses. Most students successfully cope with such stresses; however, some of them suffer from affective and behavioral disorders as well as social problems. These problems commonly have bad effects on their educational performance and social interactions.

Coping styles are another effective variable in students’ educational achievement. In recent years, health psychology has given much importance to the role of people’s coping styles and life style in their mental health. Coping styles are cognitive behavioral abilities that an anxious individual may use to control his stressful internal and external specific needs. Farzad, Jafarnejad, Moradi, and Shokri (2004), in their research “*relationship between five major factors of personality, coping styles, and mental health in undergraduate students,*” found that there is a significant relationship between problem-oriented and emotion-oriented styles with health. However, no relationship was observed between avoidance coping style and mental health. In other words, there is a negative correlation between problem-oriented and mental health variables, while emotion-oriented and mental health variables have a positive correlation with each other.

Shokri, Moradi, Farzaneh, Sangari, Ghenaei, and Rezaei (2005), in their research “*role of personality and coping style traits in students’ mental health: presenting causal models,*” found that responsibility and flexibility have a positive significant effect on the problem-oriented style and a negative significant effect on sex. Their results, however, showed that flexibility and dutifulness had a negative significant effect on mental health and a positive significant effect on neuroticism and emotion-oriented variables.

Khayer and Seif (2004) in a research entitled “*relationship between stress coping styles and students’ educational achievement considering some demographic factors,*” understood that there is a significant relationship between position evaluation coping skills, or the same problem-orientedness, and educational achievement. However, educational achievement has no significant relationship with other coping skills.

Coping is perceived as cognitive behavioral attempts to prevent, organize, and suppress an individual’s stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1948; quoted by Penley and Tomaka, 2002). Based on a research, Endler and Parker (1990) differentiate between people’s general coping process in terms of three basic coping styles: problem-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance coping styles. Problem-oriented strategies describe the methods whereby an individual tries to reduce stress. Emotion-oriented coping strategies describe the methods based on which a person self-concentrates and all his attempts are focused on reducing his unfavorable feelings. Various studies on coping have examined the process and its effects on people’s health under different conditions. Most research findings have introduced emotional coping as the most effective medium between stress and disease (Pakenham, 2001). Avoidance coping has been recognized as an efficient short-term strategy. However, in the long run, it prevents psychological compromise and increases frustration symptoms such as depression. According to Lazarus and Folkman’s model (1984), cognitive skills are used in the coping process to solve problems. By applying the efficient problem-oriented coping style, an individual uses cognitive skills for problem-solving. Dynamism in positive problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles may increase people’s self-confidence, thereby improving their problem-solving skills (Besharat, 2006).

Educational achievement is considered as one of the most important outputs of educational system for both individual and society, and recognition of effective components can provide suitable conditions for educating literate creative people in different scientific areas. Therefore, the present research generally intends to, while examining the students’ educational performance, study its relationship with mental health and coping styles.

II. Research method

This research is a descriptive survey. Its statistical population covers all the students studying at different faculties of Kashan University in the academic year 2013-2014, such as engineering (1870 individuals), humanities (848 students), literature (507 individuals), art (603 students), and science (1157 individuals). From the faculties mentioned above, 300 students were randomly selected, 60 individuals each. To select the sample, random sampling method was used.

III. Research tools

To answer the present research hypotheses, two questionnaires were used as follows:

1. Goldberg’s General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)

This questionnaire deals with studying an individual’s general health during the recent month. Its main form contains 60 items. The present research used the shortened 28-item form (GHQ-28) introduced by Goldberg and Hiller (1979). The questionnaire has four subscales including physical signs,

anxiety and sleep disorder, social function disorder, and depression signs. Each subscale comprises seven questions. There are different ways for scoring this test. Taghavi (2001) studied the validity and reliability of the 28-item questionnaire for a group of students in Iran and reported the validity coefficient for all the scales as 72% and its reliability coefficient as 93%.

2. Stress Coping Styles Questionnaire (CSQ)

This questionnaire, designed by Endler and Parker (1990), has a short 21-item and a long 48-item form. Endler and Parker (1990) obtained the reliabilities of problem-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance styles for males to be 92%, 82%, and 85% respectively. However, their reliabilities for females were 90%, 85%, and 82%, respectively. Jafarnejad (2003) has obtained the reliability coefficients for problem-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance styles as 83%, 80%, and 72%, respectively. Considering the share of each faculty and sex in the sample size, both questionnaires were randomly distributed among the male and female students. Then, the questionnaires were collected after being replied by the students.

IV. Findings

Table 1. Description of students' educational achievement at Kashan University

Educational achievement	Quantity	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
	300	12.14	19.80	16.84	1.286	-0.425	0.499

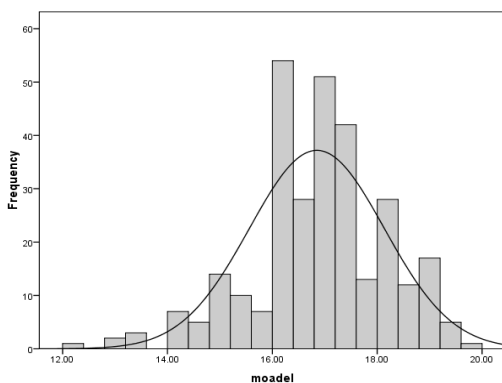


Diagram 1. Description of educational achievement

Table 1 and Diagram 1 both describe the rate of students' educational achievement at Kashan University. The statistical

computations, based on the data from the above-mentioned table and diagram, indicate that the students' minimum and maximum average scores were 12.14 and 19.80 [out of 20], respectively. Hence, the mean of their average scores and the standard deviation were obtained as 16.84 and 1.286, respectively. The research skewness is -0.425; therefore, its mean is smaller than the median. Its kurtosis equals 0.499. Thus, variable distribution is higher than the normal one.

Table 2. Description of mental health and coping styles

Index / Variable	Quantity	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Mental health	300	1	9	3.84	1.28
Problem-oriented	300	5	74	52.99	8.08
Emotion-oriented	300	28	71	49.49	8.28
Avoidance	300	29	66	47.16	7.49

Table 3. Correlation matrix between mental health, coping styles, and educational performance

Variable	Educational Performance	Mental Health	Problem-oriented	Emotion-oriented	Avoidance
Educational performance	1				
Mental health	-0.015*	1			
Problem-oriented	0.008**	0.78	1		
Emotion-oriented	0.032*	0.78	0.000*	1	
Avoidance	0.054	0.67	0.000*	0.002**	1

*: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$

As shown in the table above, there is a negative significant relationship between mental health score and educational performance (*Note: Higher scores denote worse mental health*). Of coping style variables, both problem-oriented and emotion-oriented styles had a positive significant relationship with educational performance. However, there was an insignificant relationship between avoidance coping style and educational performance.

Table 4. Coefficients of independent variables in step-by-step regression form

Independent variables	Non-standardized coefficients		Determination coefficient (R^2)	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	T-value	Significance level
	Regression coefficient (B)	Standard error				
Depression	-0.257	0.030	0.0341	-0.199	-8.544	0.000
Anxiety syndrome	0.111	0.028		0.218	3.957	0.000
Problem-oriented	-0.021	0.008		0.158	2.477	0.014

To evaluate the effectiveness rate of mental health (physical syndrome, anxiety syndrome, social interaction deficiency, and depression) as well as coping styles (problem-oriented, avoidance, and emotion-oriented) on educational performance, the step-by-step regression method was used. Of the components cited above, there is a relationship between physical syndrome, anxiety syndrome, and problem-orientedness with educational performance. The data in Table 3 show that depression syndrome, problem-oriented style and anxiety syndrome determine 0.341 of the variations in educational performance rate ($R^2 = 0.341$). According to Beta coefficient, the effect rates of depression syndrome, anxiety syndrome, and problem-oriented style on students' educational performance are - 0.19, 0.18 and 0.15, respectively.

V. Discussion

Studying the factors that influence educational achievement is a complicated problem, because it is a multi-dimensional element and slightly related to students' physical, social, cognitive, and affective developments. In the past, most researchers emphasized the effect of students' mental and cognitive abilities on their educational achievement (Parker *et al.*, 2004 Tinto, 1993). However, as time passed, it became evident that although mental and cognitive abilities are to some extent related to educational achievement and may largely predict it, they are not the only key for educational success prediction. Therefore, researchers have recently noticed a series of non-cognitive factors that can influence educational achievement, in particular, and success, in general.

Data analysis results showed that there is a significant relationship between mental health and educational achievement. This finding is consistent with the research results obtained by Amini (2007) as well as Rafati, Sharif, Ahmadi and Shafiei (2000).

Educational achievement is one of the important issues central to many educational and psychological studies. There are different factors involved in educational achievement of the young, particularly students. Some of these factors are personal, and some others are social and academic. Intelligence, prior cognitive learning, and mental health with affective and psychological origins are among the personal factors.

The pupils and university students that are physically weak and lack full general health cannot have enough activity. Because of susceptibility to catch various diseases, they cannot achieve and, therefore, get educationally retarded. As a result, it can be stated that general health has different dimensions that may influence educational achievement (Parsa, 1993).

Psychological and affective conditions, along with mental health, may be considered as the main factor in educational achievement. Although many pupils and university students have IQs higher than the average level and enjoy considerable learning capacities, they suffer from educational anorexia and cannot have favorable educational achievement due to problems such as affection poverty, lacking self-confidence, little sense of self-expression and self-valuation, anxiety, depression, psychological conflict, etc. (Biabangard, 2001).

There is relationship between (problem-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance) coping styles with students' educational achievement. Data analysis results show that there is a significant relationship between students' use of problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles with their educational achievement. However, avoidance coping style and educational achievement are not significantly related. Tabebardar and Razavieh (2003) illustrated that educational achievement and problem-solving strategy are positively related. They further stated that individuals that use effective confrontation strategy, like problem-orientedness, have a better educational performance and using this strategy leads to mental health and influences achievement motive. Their research also shows that there is a negative significant relationship between avoidance strategy and educational achievement, and using avoidance strategies brings about weak educational and cognitive consequences.

Given what stated above, researchers in different areas of educational psychology have long attempted to understand a set of determining factors in educational achievement (Hadadi-Kouhsar, 2007). Educational achievement has the highest significance in academic environments, particularly at universities. College students who are brought about by the educational system may succeed in their educational achievement when they have the required mental health. As coping styles deeply influence educational achievement, they cannot be neglected. Thus, it can be stated that application of effective coping styles may determine people's successful educational performance.

Further suggestions

1. To generalize the research findings, similar studies are conducted on age and regional populations, and intervention methods are used for examining the effects of these factors (i.e., coping styles) on increasing mental health in adolescents.
2. It seems necessary to examine the relationship between mental health and coping styles with educational

achievement in student groups for designing future studies. Therefore, the present research may be helpful.

3. In addition, it appears necessary to study mental health and coping styles at a broader level at different universities.
4. It is better to hold educational workshops to increase stress coping skills and include them into courses such as social and educational science.
5. Since mental health is an important factor in students' educational achievement, it is suggested that the required general conditions be provided for their mental health.
6. As the coping strategies used by people are variable and their variation requires education, it is essential that university authorities and counselors attempt to increase students' health level through planning. In this way, by reinforcing the factors that influence students' educational achievement, it is more probable that they constitute educational achievement.

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